Deterrence Strategies and European Security

12-15 June 2019

Wiston House, Wilton Park, Steyning, United Kingdom

This was the latest in a series of annual conferences begun a decade ago to explore issues of deterrence and assurance in a transatlantic perspective. This year's event was cosponsored by Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, the U.K. Ministry of Defense, Sandia National Laboratories, and the NATO Defense College. The agenda was organized to address four main questions:

- Are Western deterrence strategies keeping pace with political, technical, and military change?
- What more can and should the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) do to ensure that its deterrence and defense posture is "fit for purpose" in the new security environment?
- What are the implications of changing domestic politics in the United States and Europe for the assurances in the North Atlantic Treaty?
- Looking to the future, what alternative security orders might emerge?

Eight panels were composed to address the following topics:

1. NATO and U.S. Defense Strategy
2. The Russian Challenge to the West
3. Disruptive Technologies and Deterrence Stability
4. The Crisis of Arms Control: Sources and Implications
5. The Crisis of Assurance: New Regional Challenges, New Doubts about the United States
6. The Crisis of Cohesion: Deterrence Credibility in a Changing Europe
7. Alternative European Nuclear Orders
8. "Out-thinking" Potential Adversaries

A summary of each session follows below.

In association with:

Session 1: NATO and U.S. Defense Strategy

- What does and should NATO contribute to "compete, deter, and win?"
- How should NATO deterrence strategy adapt? Can it?

The purpose of this panel was to explore how well aligned the United States and NATO are in strategic concepts. The point of departure was an examination of the Trump administration's National Defense Strategy (NDS) and the expectations it sets for NATO. That strategy highlights the administration's focus on major power rivalry and the commitment to three overarching goals: to compete, deter, and win. Among more specific goals, it underlines the imperative to "foster a competitive mindset" after a long period of seeking strategic partnership with Russia, the need for "expanding competitive space", and the challenge of competing below the threshold of armed conflict. The strategy reflects the view of Secretary Mattis and others that allies are a source of competitive advantage for the United States.

Conspicuously, thinking at NATO is not fully aligned with the Trump administration's focus on major power rivalry. To be sure, some allies are highly motivated by the challenges of rivalry with Russia, military and otherwise. But some are preoccupied by different security concerns, such as instability in NATO's southern neighborhood. Still other allies are led by individuals or parties with some affinity for Russian leadership views. Many allies are internally focused and exhibit weak public support for defense spending and/or collective security. As the alliance's Strategic Concept has not been updated since 2010, there has been no process that might compel these views to coalesce, other than periodic summits.

NATO allies are also generally reluctant to embrace the theme of strategic competition as an organizing concept for their foreign and defense policies. They have questions about what the Trump administration intends with the phrase "expand the competitive space." They do not welcome an arms race between Russia and the United States and do not want to be drawn into a competition for strategic dominance (which they see as futile). They worry about the dangers of such competition but also the risk of being overtaken and rendered largely irrelevant to their own security. There are, however, new and broadening debates about what the U.S.-China strategic competition – and potential conflict in the future – might mean for NATO.

NATO allies are also divided on what more can and should be done to adapt the alliance's deterrence posture to post-2014 requirements. Those who argue that enough has been done highlight the steps taken to strengthen conventional deterrence along the alliance's northern flank, its continued progress in modernizing its nuclear forces, and its embrace of cyber space as a domain of military operations. Those who argue that more needs to be done highlight the absence of effective counter A2/AD strategies, capabilities, and operational concepts, as well as a coherent integration of all of the tools of deterrence.

When it comes to the discussion of winning, there was even less agreement. For some, winning means having a credible theory of victory in a war started by Russia and escalated by Russia—a theory that brings Russian leaders to a "culminating point" where they choose to concede an important interest rather than run the costs and risks of further war. For others, winning is about stripping away Russian confidence in its ability to confidently calculate those costs and

risks. For yet others, victory comes entirely in the Gray Zone of sub-conventional conflict and in a contest of wills over the European security order.

In lieu of a deeper debate on these issues, the alliance appears to be mired in the debate about whether and when allies will fulfill their defense spending and defense burden sharing obligations. To jump start a more fruitful discussion, the alliance could take on the tasks of updating its Strategic Concept. There was broad agreement, however, that this could prove unhelpful by exposing deep divisions and raising fundamental questions to which answers are scarce. A middle course makes sense: continue to use regular summits to drive pragmatic steps, while holding the alliance and the allies accountable for the accomplishment of agreed steps. Somewhat more ambitiously, the Alliance could take on the task of defining a "strategic stabilization campaign" as a response to Russian destabilization.

Are the United States and its allies well aligned at the level of strategic concepts? No, not at this time. But their differences have not prevented them from taking numerous constructive steps to address the new challenges from Russia and other challenges in the security environment. These include the adaptations already noted as well as new authorities for SACEUR, an adapted command structure to improve speed of decision making and execution, a major update to NATO military strategy, and a reasoned, balanced response to Russia's violation of the INF treaty.

Session 2: The Russian Challenge to the West

- What potential pathways to war should be of concern to the Alliance?
- In war time, what main concepts would guide Russian efforts to localize and resolve the conflict on favorable terms?
- In gray zone conflict, how does Russia seek to advance its interests?

In exploring potential pathways to war, the scenarios of concern to Russia are clear enough: Russia's primary concern is with pathways brought to it by the United States—which Russian leaders see as seeking Absolute Security (that is, freedom from the costs and risks of exercising military power) in order to pursue an ideologically-driven agenda of regime change wherever it deems other regimes unacceptable. In short, Russia's leaders are concerned about wars arising from U.S. support for color revolutions around the Russian periphery and in Russia itself. Accordingly, they are also concerned about NATO support for U.S. objectives. In contrast to years past, Russian leaders speak less frequently about projecting power into what they call the "near abroad" to protect Russian speaking minorities.

The level of ambition of Russia's current leadership—especially but not exclusively that of President Putin – remains a subject of a debate. Is he a man who might yet choose to go down in history based on his accomplishments for Russia to date? Would he be willing to leave to his successor(s) the dismantling of the European security order he so opposes, along with the institutions of U.S. leadership? Are those around him simply feathering their own beds, or do they imagine accomplishing something dramatically more for Russia on their watch? Differences of view on this subject inform different European expectations about the role deterrence plays in managing the risks of Russian aggression. Those who assess that the short-term risks should be considered conclude that NATO should continue its "sprint" to strengthen deterrence and

collective defense. Those who focus instead on Russia's long-term decline conclude that NATO should consolidate its gains and not react in ways that amplify Russian anxieties.

Discussion of Russian military concepts focused on the growing complexity of Russian military thought across the full conflict spectrum (from gray zone through political-military crisis into armed hostilities). It also examined Russia's comprehensive approach to the use of all tools at its disposal to achieve its deterrence, defense, and war-time objectives. These include hard and soft power tools, kinetic and non-kinetic means, both nuclear and non-nuclear strike weapons in both strategic and non-strategic roles, including exotic "revenge" nuclear weapon systems revealed by President Putin in March 2017.

Russia's progress in shifting the burdens of defense off of nuclear means to modernizing non-nuclear means was much debated but left unresolved. Some experts expect such a shift, whereas others conclude that Russia's ongoing improvements to both nuclear and non-nuclear means will not result in a shift of any kind, just more Russian confidence in its ability to run risks. In the gray zone, Russia's emphasis is in part on setting the conditions for success in a future short war, in large measure by establishing in the minds of Western publics and leaders that the risks of trying to reverse Russian military action are simply unacceptable given the asymmetry of stake.

The Western expert community represented in the proceedings was divided over the likely consequence of these developments. Some see the risks of war in Europe as rising, and along with it the risks of limited nuclear war. Others conclude that Russia is effectively deterred from posing an Article V challenge to the Alliance and that its actual intentions remain either unclear or unformed.

One important thread of the discussion was about the role of preemptive or preventive operations in Russia's concept of a defensive strategy and of conflict de-escalation. There were divergent views and debate was inconclusive. This was essentially a repeat of debates in prior annual conferences. This served as useful illustration of the absence of a top-down effort to resolve such differences. It is also a reminder of the importance for NATO of creating additional decision space in a crisis and conflict.

Session 3: Disruptive Technologies and Deterrence Stability

- Which technologies stand out as the most consequential, and why?
- Will deterrence become more or less stable if and as competition intensifies? How can it be minimized?

So-called disruptive technologies have gained broad interest in recent years. Many of the ideas generated to understand these technologies and their impact may yet prove to be inadequate to the task. The characterization "disruptive" imputes a quality to a broad set of technologies, only some of which may hold this potential. The focus on deterrence stability brings with it an immediate concern about instability, that seems to preclude consideration of potentially stabilizing or neutral impact of these technologies. The concept of stability itself may have to be redefined in a new technological context.

Rather than try to identify the most consequential or destabilizing technologies, analysts could usefully focus on areas of convergence among them and the ways in which they might be combined as force multipliers. This could help to reveal a more subtle set of consequences and implications. Their applications to competition in the Gray Zone may yet prove especially troubling.

From a NATO perspective, competition in the new technical domains has not yet begun to negatively alter the strategic balance, despite the fact that emerging technologies may offer adversaries various tactical advantages in certain contingencies. Many technologies are not all that new or disruptive, though the pace of change is both. The potential benefits of these technologies for deterrence and defense are real and substantial, but so too are the risks. Multiple examples were discussed, including directed energy weapons, hypersonic weapons, distributed sensor architectures coupled with AI data processing techniques, synthetic biology, and quantum computing.

An effective response to these challenges must address a series of connected questions. Where in the decision loop is the best place to lodge the human presence in AI-enabled military systems? What new norms can be generated (or will emerge) to guide behaviors in these domains? Might these new technologies combine to pose an existential threat (especially to smaller states)? Where should we compete to ensure that no side gains an exploitable advantage? Where should we eschew competition in favor of actively pursuing risk reduction regimes? What more can be done to improve the generation of the needed new expertise in government, so as to cut across areas of specialization and generational divides.

Session 4: The Crisis of Arms Control: Sources and Implications

- What are the prospects for European arms control?
- What are the prospects for US-Russian arms control?
- How might these factors combine with uncertainties about the future of the NPT and TPNW?

Although many in the room were ready to embrace the notion of a crisis of arms control, some were not. They argued that the arms control regime is going through a necessary and appropriate evolutionary phase, following on the eclipse of the strategic era in which it was born by a new strategic era with a different set of strategic problems. After all, New START was designed with a decision point at the ten-year mark and much has changed in the intervening decade. Some went further to argue that the inherited regime blocked progress in addressing these new problems by virtue of the comfort it provided in a steady-as-she-goes approach.

But this was not the dominant sentiment. The Trump administration was roundly criticized for its handling of the INF withdrawal and for its reluctance to extend the New START Treaty. There was broad and deep concern that the absence of an arms control framework and strategy would strengthen the hand of those who see the NPT as a relic of a time now gone and of those who see the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) as a viable pathway to disarmament.

The consequences of a decision not to extend the New START Treaty were explored in depth. These include (1) no restraints at a time when both have open lines for the production of nuclear warheads and delivery systems, (2) increased costs for monitoring, along with weaker results, (3) a corrosive impact on the 50th anniversary NPT review conference, (4) deeper divisions among allies, and (5) deeper erosion of the bipartisan consensus necessary in the United States for nuclear modernization.

An alternative focus was explored: nuclear risk reduction. A catalogue of possible measures has been built at UNIDIR, which is exploring select options in detail. Some expressed skepticism that the political will exists in the nuclear weapon states to reduce risk, given the signs from some capitals of an increased willingness to project nuclear risk onto others for coercion and deterrence purposes. There was a separate discussion of possible new transparency measures—and along with it the necessary recognition that China consistently and emphatically rejects such measures.

Session 5: The Crisis of Assurance: New Regional Challenges, New Doubts about the US

- How strong or weak is allied confidence in US extended deterrence? Why?
- What are the prospects for renewal?
- What lessons can be learned from Europe or East Asia about how to address current challenges?

Here too there was debate about whether a crisis exists. In a European context, the central questions are about the true intentions of President Trump (to stay or leave the alliance if re-elected) and about whether the question of long-term U.S. intentions would in fact be settled by the next presidential election. For some, the President's anti-alliance views are a symptom of deeper changes in the American body politic, with its more inward focus and rejection of U.S. leadership roles.

On extended deterrence, European allies are of many different views, although few believe that the United States would simply stand by in a circumstance of major war in Europe. A few cited the Trump administration's commitment to supplemental low-yield nuclear weapons and its funding increases for the European Reassurance Initiative as proof that, despite its rhetoric, the administration is seriously committed to credible extended deterrence.

Discussion also revealed rising European concern about whether the United States has the military and accessible financial means to meet the requirements of simultaneous and increasing challenges to U.S. extended deterrence in Europe and in the Asia-Pacific. Many European experts share the concerns expressed by the U.S. National Defense Strategy Commission about the apparent inability of the United States to support a "two regional wars" strategy.

The discussion also reflected a growing consensus that credibility of U.S. security guarantees in Europe will be increasingly dependent on the European investments in their own capabilities. The United States is and will be crucial for securing a favorable balance of power in Europe but maintaining such balance without European contributions is not possible.

In an Asian context, similar questions and concerns can be heard. Experts in Japan, South Korea, and elsewhere question U.S. staying power and willingness to run risks on behalf of others. The unending debate about the future of the U.S. commitment and U.S. decline have taken on a sharper edge in the Trump era. A crisis of assurance does not yet exist but is clearly taking shape. One key factor will be what comes in U.S. deterrence strategy and posture when and if it becomes clear that denuclearization of North Korea has definitively failed. This will drive an intensified East Asian interest in more NATO-like nuclear extended deterrence—an aspiration that remains ill-defined and, in some ways, unsuited to the region.

A critical driver of assurance in Northeast Asia is the future of assurance in Europe. If the European gold standard (as East Asians see it) loses its allure, the temptation to find alternative means for strategic autonomy will become more prominent—in both regions.

Session 6: The Crisis of Cohesion: Deterrence Credibility in a Changing Europe

- What impact might populist nationalism in Europe have on deterrence?
- To what extent can European institutions compensate for weaknesses in the transatlantic institution?
- How do the divisions among the allies affect the prospects for further progress in strengthening the alliance's deterrence and defense posture?

In support of the case that a crisis of cohesion exists or is taking shape, arguments were made about the rise of populist nationalists in Europe who are also pro-Russian and unpersuaded of the need for a more robust NATO deterrence posture vis-à-vis Russia. Concerns were expressed about the weakening of the EU and its agenda for improved defense cooperation. Such divisions were a subject of frequent and energetic discussion.

But here too, there was a debate about the use of the word "crisis" and some potent counter-arguments. Commenting at one point in this discussion, one senior participant said "stop hyperventilating—the Alliance has lived through much worse in its history." Many were willing to concede the historical point, though they were not willing to set aside their concerns about a contemporary crisis of cohesion.

The counterargument went further. It was argued that NATO has been very successful in adapting to new challenges since 2014, "at a speed no one would have imagined." It was also argued that there is no need to compensate for weaknesses in NATO because its weaknesses are modest compared to its strengths. Rather, security experts should see NATO and the EU as partners with mutually reinforcing goals and agendas. Cohesion is what matters, not unity—and NATO has always found this when circumstances required it. Moreover, public opinion polling in recent years indicates a steady increase in public support, not public disaffection. It was further argued that the populism troubling NATO is not European populism but American populism.

Session 7: Alternative European Nuclear Orders

- Are there viable alternatives to the current nuclear order? Why? Why not?
- What would strategic autonomy mean, in practice?
- Is a denuclearized Europe plausible? A re-nuclearized Europe?

This particular discussion illuminated the very substantial difficulty European states would have in ensuring their strategic autonomy in the absence of a clear transatlantic link and the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent.

From a technical perspective, there are a variety of ways in which the integrity and independence of European nations might be protected by some nation or nations. But especially in the nuclear dimension, technical considerations quickly give way to political ones. There was an especially pointed discussion of the proposition that France stands ready to extend nuclear deterrence to others if costs can be shared, with some profound skepticism from those who are doubtful of the will or ability of any other European nation to come to their defense. For some, the United States is the sine qua non of the deterrence landscape; for others, it may be replaceable.

The Alliance's nuclear sharing arrangements received a robust defense from a number of European participants. Its values include the transatlantic link, burden sharing, shared decision-making, and nonproliferation. What are the main alternatives? These include a denuclearized Europe, a non-nuclear NATO, a new European deterrent enabled by new European nuclear states, joint extended deterrence by the UK and France, European sharing of French and British weapons, or a new nuclear framework within the EU. None of these seem plausible.

Session 8: On Out-Thinking Potential Adversaries

- What can be done to accelerate the development of new strategic thought in the West?

One of the key points in the Trump National Defense Strategy is the ambition to renew a "competitive mindset" by out-innovating, out-partnering, and out-thinking potential adversaries. As our final focus of discussion, we took up the question of what might be involved in the "out-thinking" project.

As a point of departure, it was agreed that the development of new strategic thought in the West requires many tools. These include for example improved intelligence analysis, adaptation of the net assessment methodology to strategic competition, and adaptation of wargaming to new challenges in the new security environment. At NATO, it also includes myriad activities to improve the Alliance's "nuclear IQ."

In addition to the challenge of generating new thoughts, there is the challenge of gaining traction for a few new ideas with senior policymakers. This requires getting the right people at the table at the right time to focus discussion and add new content.

The discussion reflected a widespread sense that there has been a renewal of analytical focus on deterrence (and assurance and strategic stability) in recent years. One participant expressed a

concern about overthinking the problem with an excess of in-depth analysis and a deficiency of cross-cutting analysis of a kind that can inform policy.

The discussion closed with a range of views about the needed institutional bandwidth in government, and in institutions near to government, to do the necessary thinking in a more competitive era. Few policymakers appreciate the demands now placed on an intellectual infrastructure that was heavily pruned as part of the post-cold war peace dividend.

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